I _Jeremiah Zamora_____ approve beginning consideration of the
Name/Title Date

Village Belle Vegetation Management Project.
Name of project or plan

Planning and Documentation Form

Project/Plan name: Parkview Creek Vegetation Management Project

Proponent and deciding official: District Ranger, Parks Ranger District, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests.

Anticipated level of NEPA compliance: The anticipated level of analysis for this project is a categorical exclusion (CE), as provided for under the 2014 amendment (Sections 602 and 603) of the 2003 Healthy Forests Restoration Act, commonly known as a 2014 Farm Bill CE.

Introduction/Summary: The Village Belle Vegetation Management Project on the Parks Ranger District of the Medicine Bow- Routt National Forests is designed as a response to the Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) epidemic. This undertaking has been proposed in order to increase the pace of restoration and resiliency of National Forest System lands and furthering the goals and objectives of the Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 1997 Revision and subsequent corrections (LRMP).

Background: Prior to the MPB epidemic that swept across the Rocky Mountains, Forest Service management activities in the Village Belle Vegetation Management Project area were primarily aimed at forest and range management. Management activities largely consisted of commercial timber harvest, associated transportation system development, grazing, and fire suppression throughout most of the 20th century and early 2000's.

In the years leading up to the MPB outbreak over the past decade, the project area was characterized by large continuous stands of live lodgepole pine in various successional stages. Lesser amounts of spruce and fir cover types with interspersed riparian zones, and aspen stands have also historically been present.

Following the MPB epidemic, the lodgepole pine stands in the area experienced a high mortality rate. This has led to a landscape that remains particularly susceptible to insects and disease. Due to the heavy MPB infestation this area has been designated as part of an insect and disease treatment program through Section 602 under Title VI of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003.

Project area: The proposed Village Belle Vegetation Management Project area is located on the Parks Ranger District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland approximately 25 miles northeast of Walden, Colorado in Jackson County and Larimer County, Colorado, with a legal description of:

Township(T) 11N North(N) Range(R) 78West(W) Sections, 6,7,17,18,19,20,21,30

T11N R79W Sections, 1,12,13

T12N R78W Sections, 19,30,31

T12N R79W Sections, 23,24,25,26,36

The general area is commonly referred to as the Kings Canyon area.

Purpose and need: The main purpose of the project is to address adverse effects resulting from high conifer mortality due to infestations of MPB which began in approximately 2007. Specifically, these effects are 1) Declined forest health and 2) Concerns related to the access and safety of forest users due to the abundance of snags and falling trees in affected areas.

The project area lies within the Pinkham Mountain Geographic Area (GA). The forest plan direction for the area (LRMP p.3-29) is to maintain lodgepole pine, aspen and spruce-fir cover types as the dominant cover types. Plan direction states that a variety of tree sizes and seral stages will be maintained throughout the area. Vegetation diversity will provide habitat for a full spectrum of fauna with an emphasis on big game habitat.

The project area falls within management area (MA) 5.13. MA 5.13 is to be managed to produce commercial wood products. Vegetation composition and structure will be managed for a mosaic of tree groups with different ages and heights while providing for a sustained yield of forest products.

Purposes of the Village Belle Vegetation Management Project can be summarized as follows:

- Manage forest lands affected by the MPB through appropriate silvicultural treatments to support regeneration of healthy forest conditions which are resilient to insect and disease.
- Provide for public access and safety by reducing the amount of standing and fallen dead timber.

Proposed action: In order to promote regeneration of a resilient forest in the project area, various vegetation management treatments would be used within a total project treatment area of approximately 3000 acres of lodgepole pine and mixed conifer stands which have experienced high levels of mortality due to infestation by the MPB. Treatments would restore the ecological integrity of the forest, including its structure, function, composition, and possibly ecological connectivity of treatment units.

It is not expected that the full proposed acreage would be treated. While some timber stands within the proposed action would be treated in their entirety, other timber stands might only be partially treated. This is due to varying degrees of impact from the MPB, changing timber stand conditions, adherence to all national (National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands, 2012) and Colorado state (Forestry Best Management Practices to Protect Water Quality in Colorado, 2010) best management practices, and the possibility of unforeseen resource concerns during project implementation. Additionally, protection of hydrology and soils resources require these practices, as well as avoidance of areas which were identified during project design.

Mechanized equipment will be used and may include but are not limited to bulldozers, feller bunchers, log loaders, and skidders. Other means might also be considered to accomplish the necessary treatments.

Primary access to the project area will be via existing National Forest System roads - approximately 10 miles of existing Level 1 roads and approximately 8 miles of new temporary road.

Silvicultural Harvest Treatments - Various treatment methods would be used, including the following: 1) overstory removal where a fully stocked manageable understory is in place or in areas where the intent is to protect advanced regeneration or other resources, 2) thinning, or 3) salvage/sanitation removal. The project would maximize the retention of large live trees where applicable.

Post-Harvest Treatments - Some silvicultural prescriptions would require post-harvest treatments which might include mechanical scarification, mechanical lopping and scattering of slash, mechanical piling and burning of slash, broadcast burning of slash, site prep for natural regeneration or planting of seedlings, and slash disposal, as appropriate.

Transportation System - The project could include necessary maintenance and repairs on existing permanent roads, and/or construction of temporary roads, skid trails, and other temporary project infrastructure. All temporary roads would be decommissioned within one year of project completion. Establishment of new permanent roads would not occur.

Primary Design Elements

The following primary design elements provide for consistency with the Forest Plan and other guidance, and/or minimize potential impacts to the applicable resources. These design elements are an integral part of the proposed action.

<u>Forest Vegetation</u>

- Treatment unit size shall not exceed a maximum Overstory Removal size of approximately 80 acres in order to provide for a seed source for natural regeneration of harvested timber stands.
- If a stand with dwarf mistletoe (any level) is entered, consider follow-up treatment to eradicate remaining infected trees.
- Control damage to residual trees to the extent possible by including timber sale contract provisions designed to meet that objective.

<u>Fuels</u>

- Slash pile size determinations shall be accomplished in consultation with the South Zone Fire Management Officer to allow for consideration of Colorado Air Pollution Control Division standards.
- Ensure use of appropriate equipment to limit dirt in constructed piles.

Heritage

- The Forest will follow stipulations of the *Programmatic Agreement between the United States Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Regional Office, Pike-San Isabel National Forest and Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands, Routt National Forest, San Juan National Forest and the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer Regarding Vegetation Management Undertakings* to meet responsibilities of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.
- The Forest will review records and conduct field survey to identify cultural resources prior to project implementation, and avoid or apply standard site projection measures, as follows:
    - No treatments or ground disturbance within boundaries of historic properties, or, allow treatments within boundaries of historic properties, provided:
        - Cutting is accomplished using hand tools only
        - Large diameter trees are felled away from all features
        - Materials removed from the site are removed by hand
        - No dragging of logs, trees, or thinned material across or within site boundaries
        - No use of vehicles or other mechanized equipment within site boundaries
        - No staging of equipment within boundaries of historic properties
        - No slash piles within boundaries of historic properties
- For temporary road construction or skid trails: a 50 foot buffer around historic properties will be established. The road control line will be moved to avoid the site and the 50 foot buffer area. If the undertaking consists of construction and there is the potential for unidentified buried cultural remains, the location will be moved to avoid the site and the construction activities in the area will be monitored by an archaeologist.

Hydrology

- Ensure that all heavy equipment, temporary roads, skid trails, landings, and slash piles are kept outside of the WIZ.[1] This is ensured by using the WIZ in timber sale preparation, contract development (including sale area maps), and post-harvest activities. With hydrologist approval, exceptions for limited operations within this buffer may exist when supported by topography.

[1] Water Influence Zone (WIZ) - The land next to water bodies where flow patterns, soils, and vegetation play a major role in sustaining long-term integrity of aquatic systems. It includes streams, floodplains, riparian ecosystems, wetlands, wet meadows, and springs. To protect the WIZ, a minimum horizontal width of 100 feet is used except when delineated in the field to be smaller or larger. The project record contains the 'WIZ' spatial data.

- Decommission existing and new temporary roads related to project implementation within one year after final use. Such roads include existing or new temporary roads, skid trails, and landings.
- Decommission by some combination of adding drainage features, re-contouring, scarifying, slashing, seeding, and/or barricading access to restore hillslope hydrology and resource productivity. Re-contouring shall be used where cut and fill slopes exist as appropriate.
- To the extent possible, use existing temporary roads where temporary roads are needed. *The project record contains the 'Existing Temp Roads' spatial data.*
- Include proper decommissioning treatments in contract development, KV plans, or stewardship agreements, or other appropriate documents.
- Consult with hydrologist to ensure Level 1 roads are properly closed for long-term storage following project implementation. Include proper closure treatments in contract development, KV plans, or stewardship agreements. The project record has 'Level 1 Road Closure' spatial data.
- Consult with hydrologist to limit ECA acres in the Snyder Creek sub-watershed and Parkview Creek sub-watershed. Ensure acreage limits established in sub-watersheds with high ECA are met during the plan in hand review.
- Use the WCP-Timber crosswalk in *Appendix C of the hydrology report* to incorporate appropriate measures and design criteria from the Watershed Conservation Practices (WCP) Handbook (FSH 2509.25) into timber sale preparation, contract development, and post-harvest activities.
- Consult with hydrologist as needed when designing the size, orientation, and surface roughness of clearcut openings to prevent snow scour and site desiccation. For size, limit clearcut opening diameter or windward width to approximately 15 times the height of surrounding trees. For orientation, use natural wind breaks created by trees and topographic features, establish irregular shapes (more perimeter/area ratio), and position openings perpendicular to the prevailing wind. For surface roughness, ensure adequate slash or other features to trap and hold snow on site.

<u>Public Safety</u>

- Appropriate traffic control measures and warning signs within the project area will be in place during implementation to inform forest users.

<u>Rare Plant Species and Habitats</u>

- Prior to project implementation, conduct field surveys of suitable rare plant habitat to determine if individuals or populations occur and could be affected. Threatened, Endangered, R2 Sensitive and local concern plant species (SoLC) will be subject to a limited action buffer in which heavy equipment will be prohibited and timber harvest may be limited. Buffer width (typically 30 to 100 feet) will be agreed upon by the botanist and District Ranger.

<u>Recreation</u>

- No mechanical operations during the first day and weekends of big game seasons as determined

annually by Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

- Identify and protect trails in contract and sale area maps. Effectively close temporary roads.
- All trails shall be left in an open condition following project implementation.
- Operations- close and sign roads and trails where operations are occurring. Limit operations where practical to confined areas or road systems to minimize impacts to recreation users in the rest of the project area.
- No operations on Federal Holidays.

Soils

- Slash shall be lopped and scattered to the extent practical while in compliance with fuels objectives in order to provide for course woody debris to reduce overland flow.
- Utilize old roads and skid trails where feasible. Space skid trails 75 feet apart, where feasible, in areas where they are to be designated.

Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive, and Species of Local Concern

- Contact the biologist or botanist if specific impacts to threatened, endangered, proposed, Region 2 sensitive species, or Forest species of local concern and/or their habitats are identified prior to or during project implementation. Management (e.g., timing restrictions or boundary adjustments) may be adjusted as necessary to reduce those impacts.

Weeds

- Where appropriate, seed or otherwise revegetate disturbed areas with native species to reduce risk of invasive species establishment. Work with the botanist to identify appropriate species for planting. Consult botanist prior to contract advertisement.
- All seed used for revegetation shall be tested for and free of annual bromes and invasive non-native species that are problematic for this Forest. Work with the botanist for the most current list of appropriate seed and for seed testing procedures.
- Equipment from unknown locations or locations known to have noxious weeds will be washed prior to being allowed onto the project area.

Wildlife

- Any discovery of raptor nesting sites within the project area will be immediately reported to the wildlife biologist and appropriate protective measures taken.
- Logging will be prohibited from May 1st to July 1st unless approved by the District Ranger in consultation with the Forest Service wildlife biologist to protect big game calving areas.
- Boundaries of treatment areas would be spaced at a minimum of approximately 100 meters apart.
- Protection of Stands with Advanced Regeneration - Applicable in mixed conifer stands: Avoid existing areas of conifers which provide greater than 35% lateral cover for snowshoe hare (>5 feet in height), as described in the Southern Rockies Lynx Amendment (2009).

Implementation

Timing

The Preliminary Proposed Action (and associated design elements) supports acceptable levels of effects for use of the Insect and Disease Infestation CE. Additionally, in the summer of 2020, Forest Service resource specialists will complete any needed fieldwork to provide additional site-specific, condition-based information and design criteria. Results of such work will be filed in appropriate resource folders; and the Fieldwork Checklist (see Appendix B), completed by the IDT, will be filed in the Implementation folder. (The Fieldwork Checklist may be used once for the entire proposal area, or applied to sub-areas within the proposal area.)

Non-ground disturbing and non-harvest aspects of initial implementation, to include tree marking and layout, which the IDT has determined need no further environmental review, may also occur in the summer of 2020. All other aspects of implementation will occur after fieldwork and final proposal modification have occurred (see Plan-in-hand Reviews, below).

Plan-in-hand Reviews

Specialists will review the proposal after fieldwork (summer 2020) and associated proposal updates have been completed, and not later than during sale preparation, to ensure that issues from fieldwork and associated effects analysis are properly addressed in final project design. Specialists will review the finalized contract prior to contract offering. This review can occur as an office exercise with field review as needed.

Documentation

The proposal to be used for vegetation treatments will be finalized prior to harvest and ground-disturbing activities. The following will be filed in the Implementation folder in the project record: 1) the final proposal, updated with additional design elements and necessary changes, 2) final shapefiles for ground disturbing and harvest activities and 3) the Fieldwork Checklist.

Other resource benefits

Resource Area	Potential Opportunity
Fuels	Localized reduction in fuel loading (which currently could contribute to high severity fires in proposed stands).
Wildlife	Potential improvement in wildlife habitat due to timber harvest.
Engineering	Potential improvement of transportation systems due to maintenance and reconstruction of roads associated with timber harvest activities.

Interdisciplinary team

Adam Bromley	Team Leader
David Francis	Timber
Jason Strahl	Heritage
Missy Dressen	Wildlife
Lance Broyles	Fire/Fuels

Marti Aitken	Botany
Rick Henderson	Aquatics
Ryan Adams	Soils
Tyler Carleton	Hydrology
Jon Myers	Recreation